

Quantity scales vs. intensity scales: degree modification of quantifiers in Finnish.

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Degree modifiers (DM) are scalar expressions that modify other words, typically adjectives and adverbs, by relating their meaning to a scale. Some DMs indicate an open scale ('somewhat', 'very'), others, a closed scale ('almost', 'completely'; cf. Paradis 2001; Kennedy & McNally 2005). I present a Cognitive Grammar account of Finnish DMs as modifiers of quantifiers, and the conditions that regulate their compatibility. My starting point is that both quantifiers and DMs express a scalar meaning, but of a different kind. The scalar meaning of an (absolute) quantifier is based on a quantity scale, which begins from zero and increases indefinitely (Langacker 2016 uses the term *measurement scale*), while that of a DM is based on an intensity scale, of which there are several types. I argue that a quantity scale and an intensity scale are conceptually different. When a DM modifies a quantifier, it expresses an intensity scale adjoined to the quantity scale and elaborates the meaning expressed by the quantifier. For such a combination to be felicitous, the quantity scale and the intensity scale need to be compatible. This is why some combinations are felicitous (e.g., *melko usea* 'rather many', *melkein kaikki* 'almost all'), while others result in ill-formedness (**melkein usea* 'almost many', **melko kaikki* 'rather all'). I test my own intuitions by conducting an acceptability-rating questionnaire to native speakers of Finnish.

Quantifiers measure either masses ('a lot of milk') or discrete entities ('many books'; Langacker 2016). I focus on two main classes of Finnish quantifiers: mass quantifiers such as *vähän* '[a] little', *paljon* 'a lot of' or *tarpeeksi* 'enough', and number quantifiers such as *usea* 'many', *muutama* 'several; a couple of', or *harva* 'few'. The quantity scales expressed by both types can be either open or closed. For instance, *vähän* 'little' is a normative quantifier and presents a negative scalar assessment of a decreasing quantity that approaches the limit of zero, while its antonym *paljon* 'much' gives a positive assessment of an increasing quantity with no upper boundary. This difference has an effect on their compatibility with DMs.

My general result is that DMs of an open scale (*melko* 'fairly', *hyvin* 'very', *äärimmäisen* 'extremely') are compatible with normative quantifiers (*vähän* 'little', *paljon* 'much', *harva* 'few', *usea* 'many'), which behave like adjectives by setting up pairs of antonyms separated by a norm. In contrast, closed-scale DMs are compatible with quantifiers whose quantitative meaning includes a limit. In many cases, the limit constitutes a maximal quantity (*aivan tarpeeksi* 'quite enough', *melkein jokainen* 'almost everyone'). However, normative quantifiers with a decreasing viewing direction (*vähän* 'little' or *harva* 'few') can invoke zero as their minimum limit ('maximally few/little'). The more precise the limit expressed by a quantifier, the better the closed-scale DMs suit to modify it.

References

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